

### **White Mountain Apache BAER Program**

The White Mountain Tribal BAER Program on the White Mountain Apache Indian Reservation has been active in all phases of the National Fire Plan – including education, community assistance, interagency collaboration, and local contracting – while undertaking the enormous tasks of rehabilitating the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. The Rodeo-Chediski was the largest burn in the Southwest; it started in June 2002 on the homelands of the White Mountain Apache Tribe in east-central Arizona. The fire burned over 469,000 acres on Tribal, National Forest, and private lands. Within the fire perimeter, roughly 276,000 acres are on tribal lands. For the most part, this brought vast landscape disturbances to the region.

The BAER managers of the Rodeo-Chediski Fire attach importance to the fact that Native American Tribes have special recognition by the United States Congress because of the federal-tribal trust relationship. The BAER managers expect that a collaborative structure, with the White Mountain Apache Tribe as a full partner, will be the most efficient and effective way of implementing a long-term program. Therefore, the key position of Implementation Leader of the Rodeo-Chediski Fire BAER Plan and all of the associated emergency stabilization treatments were contracted to the White Mountain Apache Tribe.

Hundreds of people have been involved with day-to-day recovery activities. In 2004 they built 100 miles of fence to protect reseeded fire-scarred lands, planted over 650,000 pine seedlings, cleaned hundreds of clogged culverts, dropped thousands of tons of hay from helicopters to mulch hillsides, and placed tens of thousands of logs to capture eroding soil. At times, it seems the efforts are almost heroic.

The tribal program has included outreach initiatives such as a two-week educational work camp, radio call-in shows conducted in the native Apache language, and news releases in local and regional newspapers. The Tribal Tree Planting Camp was held this fall as a kick-off to encourage tribal members to contract seedling planting and to foster employment on this chronically unemployed Indian Reservation. Research partnerships have included the Ecological Restoration Institute from Northern Arizona University and the U.S. Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station in Flagstaff. Presentations on lessons learned have been given at the National Interagency BAER Implementation Leaders course and the International Erosion Control Association's annual fire meeting.

Most importantly, the fire-damaged landscape has now stabilized, protecting the canyon communities of Cibique and Carrizo from post-fire flashfloods and debris flows. Because of the hard work of the White Mountain Apache Tribe, their Tribal BAER program has earned a mark of distinction.



Forest recovery after the devastating Rodeo-Chediski Fire